

POLICY REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT PANEL REPORT

REPORT TO:	Corporate Performance Panel		
DATE:	24 July 2023		
TITLE:	Bathing Water Classifications		
TYPE OF REPORT:	Position Statement		
PORTFOLIO(S):	Environment & Coastal		
REPORT AUTHOR:	Martin Chisholm, Assistant Director Operations & Commercial		
OPEN/EXEMPT	Open	WILL BE SUBJECT TO A FUTURE CABINET REPORT:	No

REPORT SUMMARY/COVER PAGE

PURPOSE OF REPORT/SUMMARY:
<p>A Councillor request for an agenda item was made seeking a position statement on the current Bathing Water Classifications for the beaches in west Norfolk, and an update on the actions that have been taken by members/officers specifically around the 'Poor' classification of the beach at Heacham and the resultant guidance to visitors that bathing is not advised.</p>
KEY ISSUES:
<p>Members are referred to the detail below.</p>
OPTIONS CONSIDERED:
<p>Not applicable as this is an information paper.</p>
RECOMMENDATIONS:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• That the report is noted and the work of members/officers over many years is acknowledged.• That officers from the Environment Agency (EA) and Anglian Water (AWA) be invited to attend the panel's meeting in November.• That this paper is considered and that CPP refers to its own terms of reference for the remit of any other recommendations they wish to propose.
REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:
<p>The bathing season runs from May to September, whilst the formal classification will not be known until the spring all of the seasonal sampling will have been completed allowing members the opportunity to review the bacteriological results for the 2023 season in comparison to those taken in previous years.</p>

1. Background

The below information has been enhanced with extracts from the guidance and information published by the EA

Designated Bathing Waters

- 1.1 The beaches at Heacham, Hunstanton Main and Old Hunstanton are designated bathing beaches within west Norfolk, they are 3 of 424 designated bathing waters across England.

Designation in England is granted by the Department of Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). More information can be found from [Bathing waters: apply for designation or de-designation](#).

- 1.2 The bathing water season in England runs from 15 May to 30 September when we expect the most people at bathing waters. Water quality is regularly checked during the season.
- 1.3 The (revised) [Bathing Water Directive \(2006/7/EC\)](#) was fully implemented on 24 March 2015. The revised directive standards are much stricter than those for the old directive.

Bathing Waters Directive classification

There are four classifications of water quality:

- excellent – the highest, cleanest class
- good – generally good water quality
- sufficient – the water meets minimum standards
- poor – the water has not met the minimum standards.

- 1.4 Current classifications for beaches in west Norfolk

	2022	2021	2019	2018
Heacham	– Poor	– Poor	* Sufficient	* Sufficient
Hunstanton Main	* Sufficient	* Sufficient	* Sufficient	* Sufficient
Old Hunstanton	* Sufficient	** Good	** Good	** Good

Data from [Heacham](#), [Hunstanton Main](#), [Old Hunstanton](#)

This information is regularly updated throughout the season and then an annual classification for each bathing water, based on four years of data, is announced later in the year.

- 1.5 **How the classifications are made - Sampling**



- 1.6 The [image](#) above demonstrates the process for sampling during the bathing season. The sampling measures two types of bacteria, E. coli and intestinal enterococci. These two faecal indicator organisms (FIOs) indicate the level of faecal pollution in the water and can come from a variety of sources including sewage, agricultural livestock, urban drainage, wildlife and bathers.
- 1.7 EA follow a strict protocol to ensure samples are taken consistently both in terms of location and depth of water, and also covering a range of tidal states where it is safe to sample. The standards come from guidelines produced by the World Health Organisation (WHO).
- 1.8 The water quality of designated bathing sites can be obtained by visiting the EA's [Swimfo](#) site.

The samples are tested in EA labs and then the results are uploaded onto [Swimfo](#), which provides regular information on water quality across all designated bathing waters. This information is updated throughout the season and then an annual classification for each bathing water, based on four years of data, is announced later in the year.

1.9 How the classifications are made – Pollution Risk Forecasting

Assessing levels of FIOs require a laboratory analysis and days for these to be cultivated so can't be measured in real-time. Instead, to help bathers understand what water quality is likely to be on a given day, the EA carry out daily pollution risk forecasts throughout the summer. The EA issue a warnings and advice against bathing if we become aware of a pollution incident or if we forecast that quality is likely to be reduced because of predictable factors like rain, wind or tides. Warnings are posted on [Swimfo](#) and displayed on signs at the beach so bathers can make informed decisions before deciding whether to enter the water.

- 1.10 The pollution risk forecasts do not include notifications of storm overflow operations as a method to consistently assess the impact of spills to bathing waters has not yet been developed. Water companies each have their own system to inform bathers when their storm overflows operate, which provides additional information on water quality for the public.
- 1.11 This information about storm overflow spills can be found by visiting water company websites directly or the Safer Seas Service app from Surfers Against Sewage.

- 1.12 In west Norfolk the daily Pollution Risk Forecast is received by the Resort Operations team and borough's CCTV Control Room. Should an 'advice against bathing' be issued for that day, the duty CCTV Operator will trigger an update of the electronic signs at in Heacham (at North and South Beaches) and in Hunstanton (on The Green and by the Beach Patrol Station on the promenade). A new sign is being installed near to the Lifeboat Station in Old Hunstanton to cover that area.



- 1.13 The importance of near-real-time information relating to the daily Pollution Risk Forecasts cannot be understated, the regulations allow for samples to be potentially discounted where a valid Pollution Risk Forecast was in place, and is clearly displayed to the public, for that specific bathing beach at the time the EA took their sample. With bathing waters heavily impacted by heavy rainfall, such as those in west Norfolk, the accuracy of these forecasts can be the difference between an otherwise poor classification and one of sufficient.
- 1.14 As ultimately the choice to swim in the sea rests with the swimmer, our role is to collectively ensure sufficient information is available for them to make an informed choice. The Beach Safety Signs are the just one source of real time information to assist the public; the EA's [Swimfo](#) site and a number of third-party apps provide this information too.
- 1.15 Whilst predictions can vary daily, the [Swimfo](#) extract below, relating to the 13th July 2023 gives an example of the information publicly available.



1.16 **Member / Officer Actions**

Officers of the Borough Council, EA and AWA have met regularly for many years with updates to members as necessary.

During the last administration regular meetings were scheduled to update members on bathing water and beach related matters, specifically relating to the Heacham classification. These meetings included input from EA and AWA as necessary.

Appendix 1 details a summary of those meetings and the resultant notes/actions and correspondence.

Appendix 2 details the minutes and presentations given to members of the Environment and Community Panel by EA and AWA during their last visit in January 2020

1.17 **Current / Ongoing Actions**

The letter, in Appendix 1 (2203/01/27) from Rt. Hon. Rebecca Pow MP, Minister for Environmental Quality and Resilience details current work being undertaken by the EA, including additional grant funding for further sample analysis to assist in the identification of factors affecting water quality. It is hoped that the EA will be able to provide an update on these actions in the autumn.

2. **Issues for the panel to consider**

Not applicable as this is an information paper

3. **Corporate priorities**

Not applicable as this is an information paper

4. **Financial implications**

Not applicable as this is an information paper

5. **Any other implications/risks**

Not applicable as this is an information paper

6. **Equal opportunity considerations**

Not applicable as this is an information paper

7. **Environmental considerations**

Not applicable as this is an information paper

8. **Consultation**

Not applicable as this is an information paper

9. **Conclusion**

The panel is asked to review and note the actions in Appendices 1 and 2

10. **Background papers**

Please refer to Appendix 1 and 2